

THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG



By S. B. DAY

LATE OF CO. B, 22d PENNSYLVANIA CAVALRY
WASHINGTON, PA., 1914

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THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG



A POEM

Steph
By S. B. DAY

Late of Co. B, 22d Pennsylvania Cavalry

INTRODUCTION

The author was in his 73rd year when he composed this verse. He was a soldier in the Civil War from August 14, 1861, to October 7, 1864. In 1913, just 50 years after the Battle of Gettysburg, when the semi-centennial celebration of that battle was held at said place, he was there. Having been in the Union Army he conversed with many Confederate soldiers who had taken part in that engagement, and from their conversation gleaned many thoughts that here appear in song.

Washington, Pa.

1914

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If critics wish this verse to scan,
They will see it is my plan,
Of quoting lines, soon will they learn,
From Milton, Homer, Scott and Burns.
Waiting: yes; we have waited long,
For a Homer to put in song
How battle lines did sway and surge,
Upon the fields at Gettysburg.
When Lee's army on their raid,
Northern states sought to invade,
And levy ransom in their turn,
Or their cities he would burn.
Federal and Confederates true
Their sad mistakes did often rue,
It matters not how great their aim,
It oft did fail to give them fame.

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GETTYSBURG

Lee called the chiefs of his command
And gave to them his well made plans.
He said, on many a well fought field
Our foemen were compelled to yield,
And now in this a conquest great,
We'll move our base to Northern State.
There plant our flag and let it wave,
Our Southern chivalry to save.
Too many friends in Northern State,
Are waiting now to know our fate.
If we must bow, give up our cause,
Be subject to those Federal laws.
Abe Lincoln has put forth decree,
That Southern slaves shall be made free,
But then if we lay down our arms,
Return again to Southern farms,
We then can keep our Negro slave,
While Stars and Stripes shall o'er us wave.
These boasting words, they come too late,
For in the slave is our estate.
And should we fail to guard our home,
A nation then will us disown.
The Stars and Bars, that ensign grand,
Shall ever float o'er sea and land,
Or else the blood that course our veins
Shall stain the soil on Northern plains.
And now by powers that guide the sun
We'll never call our task yet done
Until that flag which we adore,
Above a new-made nation soar.
Jeff Davis guides our ship of state,
His orders true I will relate.
Our forces now you will combine
North of Mason and Dixon's line.
Forage for an army there
You will find, and yet to spare,
And in towns when you arrive
Demand a ransom for their lives.
And if your order they do spurn
Apply the torch and let it burn.
At Harrisburg you end your route,
Then your forces face about.
Before you leave that Union den
you must and will demand of them,
Five hundred thousand dollars down,
Or you will surely burn their town.
These orders come from chief of state,
In council here we will debate.

If any one the plan oppose
Objections now he will disclose.
The purpose now to you will tell,
'Twill nerve the heart, your fears will quell.
That is if on some Northern plain,
We o'er our foe a victory gain,
Old England then will say to us,
Your glory's won, you cause is just.
If any then hath words of cheer
We gladly now will from them hear,
For by tomorrow noonday sun,
Our Northern march will be begun.
Up spoke a chief and in his mien
From you my thoughts I will not screen,
But now will say if there be need
I will follow where ere you lead.
And if needs be I'll leave my bone
On fields to bleach in Northern zone.
And should we there a victory gain
It will add new laurels to our fame,
Prove to the world and by its laws
That foeman cannot crush our cause.
Our cause is just, I have no fear,
But from other chiefs will gladly hear.
Next to speak said, I only know
That where man leads I dare to go,
And should we on this venture great
A victory gain in Northern state,
Our independence then we'll claim,
Confederate States shall be our name.
In ev'ry home none shall be missed,
And slavery there can still exist.
Now my friends I have had my say,
Am eager to be on our way.
The last to speak was truly brave,
And to his hearers slowly gave,
His opinion of the plan
Formed by chieftains of his clan.
"My friends you fail to count the cost,
If a victory there is lost,
And if we thus such fate would meet,
Two hundred miles we must retreat,
And guard our force, endure the toil
As we backward from our foe recoil.
So here we are so well entrenched,
No foe can break through our defense.
One man behind embankment true,
On open space as good as two,
And when we leave, then we are bound
To strive with foe on open ground.
Further I pray you be discreet,
For Hooker now is not asleep.
But through his scouts he soon will know
The way our army starts to go.
These words are spoken not in fear,

But for the cause I hold so dear.
And should man here dare call me coward,
He must from council be debarred.
For wrath I could not then confine,
'T'd spill his blood or he'd spill mine',
And yet will say I think not best,
To chide the Eagle in his nest.
Else we may rue the course we take,
Or in that course a blunder make.
Again I say we must be ware,
And leave the tiger in his lair.
For if his prey is once in sight,
He conquers or he dies in fight.
These warnings crowd upon my brain,
And in my dreams this vision came;
But still with mind's prophetic eye,
On distant plain I can descry,
Where Federal and Confederate foe
Have met in early morning's glow,
And each with shot and shell compete
To save his army from defeat.
And farther yet do I surmise,
That when you leave South's sunny skies
To reach that point remote from base,
The foe hath met you in the chase,
And Union soldiers there arrive
Like bees that fly from out the hive.
Around that Eagle do they swarm,
That's painted on their code of arms.
In Pennsylvania! Historic State!
You no doubt there will meet your mate.
These are conjectures 'tis but true,
But in your minds I would imbue,
Herculean task you undertake,
Be watchful and no blunder make.
For me 'tis useless to oppose
The plan already here disclosed,
So I submit to what you've done,
As I'm outnumbered three to one.
And should we meet on Northern plain,
That foe we hold in dire disdain,
We shall him fight until he yield,
Or backward from our front do reel.
And noble chieftain now we'll hear
Your orders to us made more clear."
Up rose the chief with visage bright,
And said, "the speaker is not right,
For visions always doth appear,
Like castles builded on the air,
In dreams they're builded in the night,
And soon they vanish from our sight.
So General Ewell with his corps
Will lead the way and go before.
Westward will he lead his men,
O'er hill and dale and mountain glen,

Until he reach that valley wide
 Where Shenadoah rolls its tide,
 Along the mountains rugged side,
 Follow that wide valley down,
 Until you reach Winchester town.
 Milroy is there with quite a force,
 You soon his soldiers will disperse.
 But should he try to block the way,
 Surround his force, bring him to bay,
 Demand surrender of the fort,
 To Southern prison his men export.
 Then A. P. Hill with soldiers true,
 Your line of march he will pursue.
 When Longstreet with his gallant men
 Will follow on to mountain glen.
 Then turn to right and on the way
 March down the valley of Luray.
 And where the mountain has been cleft,
 At Snicker's Gap turn to the left,
 Then to increase our army's might,
 Will join our forces on the right.
 March onward with our front so wide,
 Until we reach the river's side
 Where the Potomac wends its way
 Onward toward the Chesapeake bay.
 There in moonlight's brightest gleam
 We'll wade across that silent stream.
 And when on other bank we stand
 We then are in my Maryland,
 Which State I now to you proclaim
 Shall ever wear Confederate name.
 Onward march until tramp resound
 Upon the streets in Hagerstown.
 Pursue the way but bear in mind
 You soon will cross o'er Dixon's line,
 And then your orders are already read,
 For now on Federal soil you tread.
 Diverging then you spread your corps
 With front full thirty mile or more.
 Scour the country good and complete,
 Take that which horse or man will eat,
 For our great army we must sustain
 By that from which the foe we gain.
 So as the sun climbs o'er his arch
 Go start your soldiers on the march.
 Stewart with his cavalry
 Ever on our right shall be,
 To guard our flanks, if any force
 Should dare dispute our Northern course.
 These orders now I do complete,
 Obey, for I will not repeat."

Readers all must understand
 That General Hooker had command
 Of the force that must oppose

That great army of our foes.
For full three days before they start,
The Confederate army on their march
Did Hooker's spies their plan find out
And made known to him their army's route.
Then Federal forces broke their camp,
And started Northward on their tramp.
Hooker moved his force and marched so well,
He kept with Lee about parallel,
Our nation's capitol to guard,
That our fame remain unmarred.
But on they go with might and main,
To check Confederate army train.
At Frederick City in Maryland
Hooker rests his valiant band,
And to Halleck he sends request
For ten thousand men now on the crest
Of Maryland heights, where no foes
From that strong fort can be disposed.
At Harpers Ferry, historic town
Where traitors hung brave old John Brown,
Whose only crime was work to save
From owner's lash the poor old slave.
But Halleck to Hooker did report
We cannot spare those troops from fort,
As Harpers Ferry is the key
Between our city and General Lee.
Then General Hooker boldly spoke,
"What good's the key when lock is broke."
And if to hold those troops is your plan,
Put my successor here in command.
And so next day did General Meade
Appear to take the army's lead.
Eight days had marched this Union force
Without rest for man or horse.
So now doth Meade take time to plan,
And thus arrange his whole command.
At Frederick City for two days
Is where the Union army lays;
And there in council was disclosed
The strength and number of our foes.
With Lee's army all combined,
One hundred thousand men in line.
By scouts this number hath been gleaned
As their army crossed o'er streams,
While in the Federal army then
There is but ninety thousand men.
Then said they all, that we are bound
To make the loss on vantage ground,
Then on the morrow at break of day
Meade starts his soldiers on the way.
They move along, that valiant crowd,
With heart so light and steps so proud,
They know where met on open field
Their foemen were compelled to yield.

So now our foe we'll gladly greet
With shot and shell where e'er we meet.
All day they march with banners bright
Until they go in camp at night.
The lines that day somewhat diverge
But Buford went to Gettysburg.
And when the darkness hid the light,
Draws on the scene her vail of night,
Then did foe's campfires burning bright
On mountain side appear in sight.
Then Buford knew, as well he might,
That early morn would bring on fight.
So he did place his pickets out,
On ev'ry road he had his scout.
Then says to soldiers, rest you may,
On the morrow will bring the fray.
And before the sun sinks in the west
You may in death be laid to rest.
Remember this we must be brave
The honor of our flag to save.
So now go rest in slumber deep
While valiant guards your vigil keep,
Early in the morning's gleam
The foe's advance is dimly seen.
The call to arms rang out on air,
The order was for war prepare.
And Buford did his men assign
Their places on the skirmish line.
Not far advanced till they could see
The scattered line of General Lee.
Then foes have met on open ground
And quick the noise of war resound.
Oh! can it be that battle's broil
With blood shall stain our native soil?
Ah yes, for now that crimson stream
From wounded men is plainly seen.
Confederate line is now reinforced
And scarcely checked upon their course,
Until they reach the Federal line
Where Buford's men are now combined.
So here they halt for these brave men
Will never yield their ground to them.
Then in their ranks did volleys pour
Until the sound was ceaseless roar.
But oh how long can they endure
Such fearful odds against them pour?
Remember well these men who fought
Were dismounted men from Federal troop.
Two hours they fought and brave were they
To hold Confederate force at bay.
But soon there comes at double pace
The infantry to take their place.
So mount they then as well they might,
And take their place upon our right,
But now a battle begins to rage

That will find space on history's page,
To record the deeds that here were done
By this nation's heroic sons.
And while the cannon loudly sound
General Reynold comes on the ground,
And with eagle eye took in at glance
The whole of country's wide expanse,
And saw at once with Federal might,
Here was the place to make the fight,
And with a courier's hasty speed
Sent back the word to General Meade.
Then did Reynolds order forward
Valiant troop with General Howard.
Scarcely had they reached the field
When General Reynolds was seen to reel,
The blood was streaming from his head,
He fell from horse and soon was dead.
Oh, cruel war! No one can tell
How soldiers wept when Reynolds fell.
The men who that day's battle bore,
Was from the First and Eleventh Corps.
All day they fought with might and main
On these two corps was fearful drain.
When by a charge the foe attacks,
As many times were driven back.
But truly we must count the cost
As many men were each time lost.
And now the day is nearly done,
And Federals outnumbered four to one,
And when that force comes on the field
The Union troops do backward reel.
When on the hill above the town
They make their stand and hold their ground.
Thus ended there that first day's fight
When evening's shade brought on the night.
Oh, must I tell the fearful cost,
Nine thousand men that day were lost.
One thousand dead on ground there laid,
The others wounded or prisoners made.
And when our troops that day did yield
The enemy camps upon the field.
And through the night our traitorous foes
Stripped the dead of all their clothes,
Causing that name which is "unknown",
To be carved upon that marble stone
That marks the grave where yet they sleep,
And our nation great will vigil keep.
So soldier sleep, take sweet repose
For morrow's deeds no one yet knows.
And as this army sorely bleeds,
Comes Hancock on his foaming steed,
And looks around all o'er the land
Then says, "that here we'll make our stand".
So back he goes on fleetest steed
Reports the same to General Meade.

General Meade gave orders then
To forward march, my gallant men.
Before the sun makes light the day
We must be far upon our way,
For in our front has been attack
And our force is beaten back.
So now, my men, I pray be brave,
The honor of our nation save,
For loss of battle we must atone,
Fight for country, flag and home.
So Meade's soldiers, firm and strong,
They all that night do march along.
When in the morn at break of day
They reach that point where soldiers lay,
Who on the front the day before
Had tide of battle boldly bore.
Then cheer on cheer did rend the air
For men who could so nobly dare,
To stand and fight, with flag unfurled,
When was such odds against them hurled.
And as they come are soon assigned
To places on the battle line.
And all forepart of second day,
Like tigers watching for their prey,
Did these brave soldiers watch to see
Where attack be made by General Lee.
When at three o'clock in afternoon
Was heard the cannon's deathly boom,
As General Longstreet on Lee's right
Attacked Sickles with his might.
From this time on until day is past
Did the struggle here for victory last.
Such fearful slaughter of Union men,
As in this fight near devil's den,
Ne'er was seen, for in that fray
Our line did seem to melt away,
To them great loss in those two hours,
Each time they charge with weakened powers.
From Little Round Top's rocky peak
Did Union soldiers vengeance wreak
When Longstreet with his valiant men
Charged up through the Devil's Den.
And from that wheat field stained with gore,
Did leaden hail upon them pour,
Until that little stream that flows along
Was crimsoned dyed from soldiers' wound.
Then on across to Emmittsburg road
Did these two armies each other goad,
Until the ground with blood was stained,
And neither had a victory gained.
Now there with many men bereft,
They signally fail to turn our left.
In this fierce fight of Sickles' men,
Eight thousand there the loss has been.
Some high in rank that led brigades,

Quick in death General Zook is laid.
His loss was great, our nation need
No braver men to soldiers lead.
General Sickles too who led that corps,
Lost his leg and from field is bore.
So here the night takes place of day,
And Longstreet sullenly turns away.
But here the fray is not confined,
For it rages all along the line.
A. P. Hill doth charges make,
But fails to even our center shake,
And on around is Ewell still,
Fighting hard to claim Culps Hill,
But here the moon with its silent beam,
Throws o'er the fight its subtle screen.
And then to guard against alarms,
Both armies sleep upon their arms.
And when the Federals sum up the cost,
They find ten thousand men are lost.
This number true is loss combined
With right and left and center line.
That night where these two armies lay,
Is Spangler's Spring from each half way.
And there are pickets placed so close
That they with each other do converse.
And at once they make decree,
That for the night that spring be free.
To quench their thirst and lave the wounds
Of wounded men there on the grounds.
And as the night drags slow along,
Is heard the night owl's doleful song,
Mingled with the groans of men,
Lying there in that rocky glen
Where they had fought in light of day,
Their life's blood now slow ebbs away.

On second day Confederates found
That General Meade had held his ground.
Then General Lee, in council great,
That night again did hold debate,
To see if chiefs had in their mind
Best way to pierce the Federal line.
For I am bound, said he, to break
Their line and of them prisoners make.
Or else upon this Northern plain
My life's blood this earth shall stain.
So now, say on make known your plan,
How best to move our whole command.
Longstreet arose and truly said,
Today our army surely bled,
At every point where assault was made,
Our soldiers have been sore dismayed.
As yet we cannot count the cost
And tell how many men we lost.

Now general, I would true advise,
We leave Meade's army where it lies,
Further South on some other plain,
We have better chance to victory gain,
As here he has such a stronghold,
His advantage o'er us is full two fold,
But no, says Lee, I will not go,
And here will Federals overthrow.
As I this night from Southern source,
By Pickett's men am reinforced,
Who have marched all this live long day,
And yet are eager for the fray.
Also Stewart with his cavalry,
Twelve thousand strong his force will be.
So with that force and with its might
On t'morrow will turn the Federal right.
We'll mass our men in strong brigades,
And march across that level glade,
On yonder hill with trees in view,
Is where we'll cut their line in two.
When through that line a gap is made,
The corps of Hill will bravely wade.
While orders thus I do define,
For the attack on whole of line,
Longstreet's force will then again
Drive Federal left from rocky glen.
And now you have my orders true,
Do not fail to them pursue,
For on the morrow I can descry,
If our nation live or if it die.
There their council then they close,
Prepare to meet their hated foes.

Now as the night drifts slow away,
The Union army prepares for fray,
That on this field they know must come
When night gives way to light of sun.
Then doth General Meade engage
In converse with his valiant aids.
And these all agree to meet the foe
With might where e're he strikes a blow.
But where our line in numbers lack,
Will meet the foe and drive him back.
For now we have almost two corps
Who have not strain of this battle bore.
Marched all day to reach this field,
And as they marched heard cannons peal.
So through this night our lines arrange
For battle when 'tis heard again.
Then do this council wait to learn
Which way the tide of battle turn.
For excitement in the minds of men
Cannot be discribed by a writer's pen.
And now far out in eastern sky,

Sun's rays of light are streaming high,
Making known that another day
Is coming to witness what e'er it may.
Then through that morning's misty screen
Confederate soldiers are faintly seen,
Marching around the Federal right
To turn it backward with its might.
But no, General Geary with equal force
Has met him in his onward course.
Then again is heard the battle's roar,
As volleys into their ranks are poured.
And so begins that third day's fight,
As Confederates strive to turn our right.
Like wind that blows with strongest breeze
The leaves from off the forest trees,
Men are swept by the battle storm,
As it rages in that early morn.
Still do they strive at fearful cost,
To gain the ground that they had lost,
For at every point where is attack,
Foot by foot they are driven back,
For full five hours did Confederates fight
To crush that force and turn our right,
When General Johnston grew so fierce,
He massed his men our line to pierce,
But General Shaler with his brigade,
Is sent across to Geary's aid.
Then doth Geary with force enlarged,
Make on Johnston a fearful charge.
He fought so hard, was loth to yield
Such vantage ground on battle field.
But yield he did and quickly too,
As Geary's men soon him o'erthrew,
And forced him back to valley's glade,
Where all day long he calmly laid,
Not daring again to engage in fight,
Or undertake to turn our right.
The time of day, yet only nine—
First victory gained on right of line.
Confederate General Stewart doth move
Along the valley's surface smooth,
Farther out from Union line,
That his purpose may not be defined.
With cavalry twelve thousand strong
He doth cautiously march along.
When on our right three miles or more,
He meets General Gregg with cavalry corps.
Two foes have met with equal force,
And strive to turn each from his course.
With cannon, carbine, pistol too,
When empty them away they threw,
Then sabers, glistening by light of sun,
Gregg orders charge upon the run.
Then with such force two forces meet,
They back rebound for many feet.

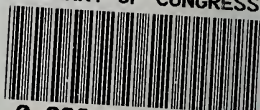
They cut and slash with sword they wield.
Sword is weapon and only shield.
Fierce is that struggle while it lasts,
While it is fierce it soon is past.
For Stewart's men cannot bear the steel,
And backward through that valley reel.
So cheers again doth rend the air
For victory that was won there.
All the forenoon of that third day
Did General Lee quietly lay,
Until one o'clock in afternoon,
When again was heard the cannon's boom.
Two hundred cannon belching forth,
Ball and shell and fire and smoke,
Reverberates o'er hill and date.
The sound doth make strong men to quail.
But soon from on the Union side,
One hundred guns to them replied.
Not because no more could be found,
But for the contour of the ground.
While this duel is so fiercely fought,
Death and destruction is sorely wrought.
And now the struggle is confined
To center and left of Union line.
General Warren goes again
To that peak above the glen,
And looks across with eagle eye,
Confederate movements to descry,
And soon he sees across that glade,
That some great move is being made
To strike Union line at some point,
And that whole army to disjoint.
Then soon he sends by signal sign,
The word along the whole of line,
That a sortie is being formed,
To break the center by fierce storm.
Each commander of Union force,
Prepare to meet them on their course.
And while this is being done,
Men cease their fire to cool their gun.
Then General Lee was sure deceived,
As they were silenced he believed.
For full an hour doth soldiers wait
To meet that force and know their fate.
At last they hear a signal gun,
And forward march, my Southern sons.
So great a charge hath ne'er been made,
Its depth was fully three brigades.
Now General Hancock hath command
Of center where his men stand.
He must meet this force so large,
As they make such fearful charge.
He rides along in mien superb,
And his voice is distinctly heard—
"Oh, valiant soldiers, stand like wall,

Or in this day our nation falls.
When comes the force you meet the shock,
Stand on your base like solid rock.
No grander tribute can soldier give,
Than the blood that makes him live."
When those men had marched half way
Across that glade in grand array,
One hundred cannon belching forth,
Fails to check them on their course,
Great gaps through their lines are made,
By scores in death those men are laid,
From right from left those gaps are closed,
And a solid front again exposed.
Those guns with shot and shell do now
Huge furrows through their ranks doth plow.
Still on they come, now ranks are shriven
Like forest trees by lightning riven.
And now the infantry take aim,
As those soldiers had come in range.
With musket's roar and cannon's boom
Pickett's charge had met its doom,
For now those men in grand array,
Seemingly soon doth melt away.
Two hundred cannon all this time
Were firing upon the Federal line.
Such fearful noise as heard 'tis true,
Since Wellington fought at Waterloo.
This trembling earth did fairly quake,
"From circumference to its center shake."
Sulphurous smoke from many guns,
When rose in air it screened the sun.
Strife rages on hearts are aflame,
They fight to save their nation's name.
As yet upon Confederate right,
Longstreet is striving with his might
To drive the Federals from rocky cliff,
And force them back upon the left.
But no, Union soldiers, true as steel,
Force them backward from the field,
Drive them out from Devil's Den,
And no charge dare they make again.
Farther along the line he attacks,
But Kilpatrick is there and drives him back.
So beaten and baffled all that day,
From Union front Lee turns away.
This ends third day with destruction wrought,
In this battle so fiercely fought,
In three days' fight the Federal loss,
Twenty-three thousand is the cost.
The Confederates lost as many more,
Forty-one thousand is their score.
This the price General Lee hath paid,
For his attempt the North to raid.
So beaten, conquered, baffled, foiled,
He turns his face towards Southern soil.

RETROSPECTIVE

Time rolls on, in its fleeting way,
Fifty years from that fearful day,
When soldiers there do meet again,
On same field where were comrades slain,
Now do they meet, not clad in arms,
Nor does bugle's blast sound war's alarm,
But friendship dwells in every heart,
And tears from every eye doth start.
When once foes, now as friends do meet,
And with embrace each other greet.
What time had done, was easy told,
For both alike are growing old.
The bloom of youth had passed away,
Cheeks now are furrowed, hair silver gray.
And on this field, that old men throng,
Their tottering steps move slow along,
Some with one leg, some with armless sleeve,
Those limbs they on this field did leave.
And now, they have come back again
To view the ground their blood had stained.
One flag doth now this nation grace,
With not a single star erased.

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